

Amendments to the Claims

Claims 1-14 (Canceled)

15. (New) A top closure panel for closing a top of an open-topped container, said panel comprising at least one aperture for receiving a portion of an article held within said container, and a tear feature for enlarging the size of said at least one aperture, said tear feature comprising at least one discrete group of slits, said slits of said at least one discrete group radiating from said at least one aperture, each of said slits of said at least one discrete group extending generally perpendicularly to a notional radial line of said at least one aperture, said slits in said at least one discrete group being arranged such that removal of an article through said aperture causes a tear to propagate to break portions of said top closure panel between radially successive slits of said at least one discrete group, said tear propagating divergently with respect to said notional radial line thereby causing the size of said at least one aperture to be progressively increased.

16. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein said at least one aperture comprises initiating means for initiating tearing of said panel, said initiating means being disposed between said at least one aperture and said at least one discrete group of slits.

17. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 16 wherein said initiating means comprises a cut line disposed in registry with a notional radial line of said at least one aperture.

18. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 16 wherein said initiating means comprises a cut line extending radially from said at least one aperture generally toward a slit of said at least one discrete group closest to said at least one aperture.

19. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein said at least one discrete group of slits includes at least two slits, and wherein one of said at least two slits furthest from said at least one aperture is longer than another one of said at least two slits closest to said at least one aperture.

20. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein said at least one discrete group of slits includes five slits concentrically arranged with respect to said at least one aperture such that one of said five slits closest to said at least one aperture is disposed in overlapping relation with at least two of said five slits further spaced from said aperture.

21. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein a termination of one slit of said at least one discrete group is spaced between 1mm and 5mm from a termination of an adjacent slit of said at least one discrete group.

22. (New) The top closure panel according to claims 15, further comprising retaining means for preventing the top closure panel from being completely released from said open top container, wherein said retaining means is so arranged as to engage complementary retaining means provided by said open-topped container.

23. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein said slits of said at least one discrete group are of substantially equal length.

24. (New) The top closure panel according to claim 15 wherein each of slits of said at least one discrete group furthest from said at least one aperture are longer than a slit closest to said at least one aperture

25. (New) A blank for forming a top closure panel for closing a top of an open-topped container, said blank having at least one aperture for receiving a portion of an article, and a tear feature for enlarging the size of said at least one aperture, said tear feature comprising at least one discrete group of slits, said slits of said at least one discrete group radiating from said at least one aperture, each of said slits of said at least one discrete group extending generally perpendicularly to a notional radial line of said at least one aperture, said slits of said at least one discrete group being arranged such that removal of an article through said at least one aperture causes a tear to propagate to break portions of said blank between radially successive slits, said tear propagating divergently with respect to said notional radial line, thereby causing the size of said at least one aperture to be progressively increased.

26. (New) The blank according to claim 25 wherein said at least one discrete group of slits comprises at least two slits, and wherein each of slits of said at least one discrete group furthest from said at least one aperture is longer than a slit of said at least one discrete group closest to said at least one aperture.

27. (New) The blank according to claims 25 wherein said at least one discrete group comprises initiating means for initiating tearing of said panel, said initiating means extending from an edge of said at least one aperture towards the slits of said at least one discrete group.